

Theology

THE REMEMBRANCER,

For Lord's Day Evenings.

No. I.

For Lord's Day Evening, January 1, 1797.

FIRST GENERAL TRUTH, ON THE BEING
OF GOD, AND OUR RELATION TO HIM,
HE BEING OUR CREATOR, WE HIS CREA-
TURES; AND ON THAT OF INFERIOR
CREATURES TO US.

*The being of God is reckoned the first, greatest, and
most fundamental of all things that are the objects of
knowledge or belief.*

EDWARDS.

NO one pretends to dispute, but that as rational creatures we have to do with the being of God. However we may be taken up with cares of this life, a care with regard to him must, sooner or later, be taken up. Speaking familiarly, he will not be overlooked. "He is not far from every one of us."

THE being of God, or the question whether there be an intelligent author of nature, comes across, and, oftentimes, startles every one us. When we look at the sun, it occurs, Did he create his own beams? did he ordain his rising and setting? is that body, though so great, intelligent?

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2 THE REMEMBRANCE. No. I.

Who that has beheld the ocean in its waving greatness has not thought of a creating hand? A man naturally thinks, Did I make that bed of waters? did I with my hands scoop out their place? did I appoint their bounds, that they should not overflow the earth? or did my fore-fathers do these things?

IT is true, the truth that God is, seems many-times too great for us to take up. The greatness of it seems to put us, weak creatures, afar off. But it is found, that it will recur again and again. It is great, but with its greatness we must have to do. Many feel, as if they were obliged to beat it back, as those who are weak-eyed would beat back the rays of the sun, but it comes upon them with renewed force.

I JUDGE it to be very certain, that no man among us, ever communicated his thoughts of God to another. And that every man is sensible of thinking, that others think little of his conceptions, impressions, and cross-thoughtfulness as to the great First cause.

HOWEVER many may fit very loose by visible institutions of religion, and indeed affect to despise them, notwithstanding, there are deep thoughts of heart which they are sensibly conscious of.

IT is a matter to be lamented, that, on the subject of this paper, there has been much said and written, but it has been too much in a speculative way. This has even (however conclusive reasoning may have been) hardened our professed Atheists. They have
laughed

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laughed at our strivings to convince them. A contending with them with their weapons has not done. Being sensible of the weakness of their own weapons, they have inferred the weakness of those of others.

THERE is an experimental treating of the subject we are upon, which, notwithstanding it may have been overlooked, is not less convincing. As the subject of natural philosophy may be treated of speculatively and experimentally, so may this. Here I refer to the accompanying sense, impression, or intuitive proof which men have of God's being; or the *experimental* sense. For as they in scripture are said to know the *judgment* of God, so they must know his *being*; for without knowing this, they could not know that.

To refer them, then, to what they know, or to clear their own knowledge to themselves, is the wisest way in having to do with them on this subject. To treat or discourse with men as if they had not the knowledge of the being of God in themselves, or as if it were to be proved to them by long elaborate reasoning, is wrong. It is true, we may have strangely lost our natural sense of God, or it may be unaccountably obscured to us; but this must be rare, especially in these days, when visible idolatry is abolished. Of the idolatrous Pagans it is said in the epistle to the Romans, that "they knew God;" they had an understanding

4 THE REMEMBRANCER. No. I.

standing or sight of him through clouds of gods and goddesses, much more then must we have.

IT is true likewise, there may be a proper and a profitable treating of the being of God in an argumentative way, or a bringing forth proof after proof that he is; but when this is done, and, at the same time, the inward inextinguishable proof which men have is disregarded, it may be so far from being profitable, that it may have the greatest of all tendencies to efface the latter.

This inextinguishable, or connatural proof, is there declared, "Who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?" or here, "Who hold the TRUTH in unrighteousness." This truth (in the connexion of this passage) must comprehend a sense or understanding of God's being. However unrighteousness may tend to drive God out of mind, and make him as if he were not, the truth that he is, circulates in the foul, more or less, as the blood in the body.

Ask any man living, ask any of the "swinish multitude," as one has deigned to call them, whether there be not one greater than himself, one greater than him who begat him, greater than him who rules over him, greater than any creature his eyes ever beheld, will he not answer in the affirmative? Ask him for the proofs which he has of his being, he may be

NO. I. THE REMEMBRANCE. 5

at a sort of loss, but this arises not from his being really at a loss, but from the fulness of evidence which he feels : He knows not how to frame his proofs of what is in itself self-evident. As ask one for the proofs of his own being, he may be at the same loss, as he who is asked for the proof of God's ; but does this shew weakness of proof ? nay, fulness.

If it is pretty likely a man may say, he hardly knows how he came to have the assurance which he has of God's being ; but he has it. And this assurance is not of less value, nor less substantiated, because he has not a distinct understanding of how he came by it. Children have an unshaken persuasion of them who are their parents, but can poorly tell of how they came to possess it.

THOSE who have gone to and fro over the fields of controversy on the subject we are upon, and who have gathered their bundles of evidence, whether for or against God's existence, when they come across one who has only gone to and fro about his business, and never troubled himself with controversy, who, notwithstanding, rests most easy as to that existence, they might think he rests easy upon shadows, upon baseless imaginations, but surely it is not so. To them he might say, I always knew, what you have with so much diligence fought for. You know not that there is a God, with more certainty than I do. The ground

of

6 THE REMEMBRANCE. No. I.

of that certainty cannot be greater than mine. By the things that are made and seen, I evidently understand the Eternal Power and Godhead.

BUT it should seem, that prior to any distinct or ostensible proofs of that Godhead, there is a sense or a conviction of it found within us. Tell a youth, nay, tell one of but few years old, that there is a God, one greater than parents, guardians, masters, magistrates ; one greater than societies, than whole cities, than multitudes, than nations ; one greater than sun, moon, and stars ; and it will be what he already well knows. He will betray no surprize upon the acquaintance. Do we who are come to manhood remember when we were first informed of the Divine Being ? As soon as we seem to notice the being of ourselves, the being of those in the house in which we are born, we notice that of God. Or in other words, it never seemed to us that we knew not that which was communicated to us, when that of God's existence was. I think this is worthy of remark. And, my Reader, if I might not seem to digress, I would observe, that the recognizing of this knowledge, even when we have to do with children, should always be found with us.

We naturally feel different in their presence from what we do in that of the greatest heaps of gold and

silver.

No. I. THE REMEMBRANCE. 7

silver. But whence this difference? Perhaps some may say, We cannot tell. But is not the difference undeniable? The answer must be, It is. But can we ascribe it to any thing except to what has respect to God? Must it not then be to some kind of knowledge of God? Notwithstanding, of this knowledge the child cannot give any literary information. When a man is about to commit a visible sin in its presence, does not this presence check him? And yet, perhaps, at the same moment, neither child nor man understands the check; but a check it is. Yea, a child speaks for God, a child that opens not its mouth: yea, it speaks more effectually than the cattle upon ten thousand hills.

If it be asked, whence can this sense or knowledge of which children are the subjects, as to the being of God, come; I answer, it arises out of conscience, and, generally out of a conscience of guilt. This throws the sense of a child, above parents, above surrounding play-mates, above all creatures, and fastens it, indeed, upon God. Being then irresistibly led in its little perverse practices to refer itself to one greater than surrounding creatures, a sense is established that there is one greater than they. Thus even children, as the apostle speaks, are a law unto themselves.

Ans

3 THE REMEMBRANCER. No. I.

AND are not men thus irresistibly led? Is not the most ignorant man so led? Are men like swine in this respect? Shall we treat our fellow-creatures as we do these? Is not this natural sense which men have, though so many have it in unrighteousness, of more value, for which men should be regarded, than stations of power, or than hoards of learning? Shall we in this boasted enlightened age be ignorant of that for which chiefly we should esteem our fellow creatures? Shall we trample on that which has respect to God, our blessed Creator? God forbid!

No. II.

